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MY GIFT.

CYRUS ELDER.

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THIS BOOKLET
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
TO DANIEL J. MORRELL,
OF JOHNSTOWN, PENN.,
AS A TOKEN OF ESTEEM,
BY
THE AUTHOR.



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MY GIFT.



FAIRY dame, when I was born,
Or kind or cruel, she was wise,
Took magic ointment in her palm,
And touched one of my eyes.

Thenceforward through my life I wear
Two eyes endowed with different sight ;
Two visions haunt me everywhere,
Diverse—nor know I which is right.

The one reveals a glorious world,
Lucent and sky-robed as a star,
Where men walk like the gods of old,
And women as the angels are.

My Gift.

And I among them keep a place,
The fairest—peer of all I see,
And all my havings I contemn,
Because of that which I shall be.

The other shows a sodden sphere
That ever swings from gloom to gloom,
Where men crawl, cursed with little cares,
To find at last a nameless tomb.

And I am poorest of them all,
And poorer that my pride is great,
And that I lose their little joys,
In longings for a happier state.

Me from myself it severeth,
This fatal gift, nor am I wise
To know which vision I should trust,
Yet know I one way madness lies.

My Gift.

I cannot win to perfect faith,
I will not rest in abject doubt,
I guard my speech—that other men
May never search my secret out.

And other men there be, who look
On me with unanointed eyes,
And say, “He is as one of us,
He differeth not in any wise.”

And there be others, whom the pure
And perfect vision maketh glad,
Who say, “He hath some distant touch
Of our madness—we are mad.”





HECTOR.

AFTER ANTIETAM.

WHEN youth in groove of pleasure ran,
And song made all my pulses wild,
I knew him, as a thoughtful child
May know the great full-thoughted man.

I knew him born for worthy strife,
To put all to the touch, and win ;
Grand battle instincts pent within
The dreary commonplace of life.

He mocked at ease—he longed for wars :
Forth through the world his spirit went,
Grasping a mighty discontent,
And hurled it 'gainst the peaceful stars.

Hector.

At length the whirligig of time,
Swung purposeless by idiot hands,
Brought strange confusion in the lands,
God waiting to close all in rhyme.

The night strove to displace the day ;
Unfaith with faith did warfare wage ;
True spirits trembled into rage,
The timid coiled themselves away.

And, gazing, with infrequent breath,
Where marble-silent Laocoon
Is eloquent, in endless moan,
Of unknown, endless joys in death.

An echo of this new-born strife,
Smote sudden all his strength awake ;
He grappled the encircling snake,
And leaped from reverie into life.

Hector.

Forth from the peaceful continent
He sped o'er the dividing seas ;
His sails outran the loitering breeze,
Blown broad before his swift intent.

And ere the ripple fell away
From the sharp prow that touched the strand,
A sword flamed from his loyal hand,
And reached forth to the doubtful fray.

I mourn no antique giant race,
I weep not chivalry in dust :
O Jongleur ! your famed heroes must
To nobler heroes yield their place.

Your arméd knight who shakes the earth,
Smiting secure at wretched kerns,
'Tis a coarse sight my spirit spurns,
It is a spectacle for mirth.

Hector.

Ah ! bid him doff his linkéd mail,
And bare his breast and bare his brow
To the swift bullet's unseen blow,
And his bronzed cheek would blench and pale.

O the swift bullet ! how it tears
The tender brows that love hath crowned,
Where Poesy her wreath hath wound,
To blossom in ambrosial airs !

O the swift bullet ! how it rends
The bosoms that are strong in truth !
How doth it spill the blood of youth,
How doth it spoil the hopes of friends !

Yet constant use all horror tames,
And the eye runs with heedless glance
Through the reports of change and chance,
Down the long list of unknown names.

Hector.

And thus it happened unto me,
That reading on in careless trust,
A line leaped like a dagger-thrust,
Hector is wounded mortally !

O nearer friends ! I cannot claim
A portion in your deeper grief,
My sudden tears have wrought relief,
And I remember all his fame.

And nearer friends, and nearest thou,
True wife—O pardon this poor song !
It cannot do his patience wrong,
Or vex his noble nature now.

In middle air my spirit sings,
It failed to win his glittering height,
And falling downward from the light
Beats the bleak wind with baffled wings.

Hector.

A truer love had found the lie ;
The wound could do no mortal wrong
To the great life complete and strong :
Hector still lives—he will not die.

I gave swift credence to the tale,
As other friends—who weeping said,
“ Hector is numbered with the dead ; ”
But the wife’s instinct did not fail.

And all regardless of his pain,
He wearies of the quiet hours
That medicine his shattered powers,
And fit him for the fight again.

Not therefore wasted is my song :
On Antietam’s bloody plain
There were a thousand Hectors slain,
And unto them its strains belong.

Hector.

O mourning heart ! your hero's name
I would embalm in deathless verse,
That all his virtues should rehearse,
That should immortalize his fame.

And if you will not crown his head
With my poor chaplet—twine it round
Some rude, neglected, nameless mound
That hides the Nation's unknown dead.





A VILLAGE TALE.

UNTIL the village of my birth
A charming stranger came,
We knew not from what part of earth,
And no one knew his name.

His eyes were black, and black his hair,
He drove a wondrous span
Of coal-black steeds—how all did stare
To see the race they ran!
He was indeed a very rare
And most mysterious man.

He smiled—his teeth were white and long ;
He sang—his voice was sweet ;
He danced—it was another song,
A singing of the feet ;

A Village Tale.

The village maids—who knew not wrong—
Confessed his charms complete.

He bought a house—he purchased lands,

He paid in ruddy gold—

I do not rightly understand

His name was ever told.

Yet *absque hoc* a lawyer planned

How he might have and hold.

He built a stately church—at least

He drew a mighty plan,

And gave such money to the priest

The work at once began :

He surely in the mystic East

Had been a holy man.

So sacred all his secret grew,

Our secret it became ;

A Village Tale.

O very silent were the few

Who guessed from whence he came ;

The priest was wise—and if he knew,

He scorned to name his name.

The Burgess—he is very wise,

He yielded at the last ;

O'er all the simple villagers

The stranger's spell was cast ;

Yet would not the rude village curs

Cease snarling as he passed.

The spaniel snarled his petty spite ;

The fat pug wheezed his wrath ;

The hollow hound did howl outright,

And ever it crossed his path :

They yelp by day—they yell by night,

No peace the stranger hath.

A Village Tale.

The Burgess in the Council Hall,
He sat serene and high ;
The Constables, so stout and tall,
Stood round him silently :
And out he spake before them all—
“ These dogs—shall they not die ?

“ These curs—a curse are they at best,
These curs of low degree,
Insulting still our noble guest
Whom by my side you see ;
Neither in East nor in the West,
A worthier than he.”

Up rose the stranger, full of grace,
He smiled on fair and foul,
And spake—when in that solemn place
A dog began to howl !

A Village Tale.

Slow settled all the stranger's face
Into a stealthy scowl.

The Burgess cried—"My liegemen tall,"
His anger made him pale,
"Go, kill this whelp within our hall—
I charge you, do not fail;
And for a sign unto us all
Bring me his ears and tail."

Up rose a man—he too was pale,
His voice was thin and fine—
"To show you have dog's-meat for sale,
Kind Sir, it needs no sign:
Seek elsewhere for ears and tail,
The whelp that howled is mine.

"The noble stranger by your side,
You know not whence he came;

A Village Tale.

Behold how I shall quell his pride,

I dare to name his name."

" Silence !" the lusty Burgess cried ;

The Councillors cried " Shame !"

" It is " — here, in his tinselled coat,

A tipstaff, stout and tall,

Did take him rudely by the throat

To thrust him from the hall ;

Yet, in a strange and strangled note,

The fiend's name he did call !

" I'm named ! I'm named," the stranger cried.

" I'm named ! I cannot stay."

The lights turned blue — the doors flew wide —

The stranger fled away.

His footsteps still may be descried,

Burned in the floor that day.

A Village Tale.

The Burgess—he is very wise—

He holds it was a shame,

Nor any villager denies

The man was much to blame.

That wretched man they still despise

Who named the foul fiend's name.





MAPLE.

I LOST the weary anguishing
Of the long Winter's pains,
And all the sweetness of the Spring
I sucked into my veins.

Upon a day the hot sun came,
June wandered through the wood :
The love-light in her eyes aflame,
Gave color to my blood.

Its red tide mounted up more high,
It ran my limbs along,
And touching the October sky,
Burst into brilliant song.

Maple.

I said—The year again is young,
The winds their wings have furled :
I spread my hands, and widely flung
My glories to the world.

Ah! they lie trodden in the mire,
They are the blind-worm's scorn,
While I confront rude Winter's ire,
Naked and all forlorn.

A sad old poet one poor shred
Of my old brightness keeps,
And musing on our glories fled,
He smiles and never weeps.





ASGARD.

BESIDE the gate where I must pass
A dextrous giant stands,
A sheaf of swords he flings aloft
To catch them in his hands.

And as he catches them again,
He hurls them to the sky :
Should but one fall unto the ground,
That moment I must die !





SONG.

I DREAMED this morning, dearest wife,
I heard the robin sing ;
Its note of love doth welcome in
The early days of Spring ;
It builds upon a budding bough,
It braves the lingering snow,
And weds as fearlessly as we,
One happy year ago.

You were my bird, my bonny bird,
Among the warbling throng ;
None, none could match in melody
The sweetness of your song—

Song.

As free as swallow on the wing,
As innocent I know,
When we were wedded in the Spring,
One happy year ago.

O loving wife ! our human life
Is like the changing year —
The chilly Spring must wear away
Ere Summer flowers appear ;
And tender buds may blossom forth,
And golden fruit may grow,
Around the nest we builded here
One happy year ago.

Dear wife, our state is far from great,
But then our care is small ;
We'll trust our little lives to Him
Who marks the sparrow's fall ;

Song.

And every day He lends us here,
Betide us weal or woe,
We'll bless the bond that bound our hearts
One happy year ago.





SIR HULDBRAND DE RING-
STETTEN.

I N the green isle of knightly youth,
I vowed eternal love to Truth ;
Wedlock her wildness did control,
And gave her perfect form a soul.

In that fair isle we would not stay,
We sped into the world away ;
The brave, sweet world—ah ! with what pride
I championed my peerless bride.

O foolish pride ! O pride forlorn !
The strong world smote my truth with scorn
O faithless love ! for day by day
My spirit fell from hers away.

Sir Huldbrand de Ringstetten.

And when I learned my bride to hate,
She changed to an avenging Fate !
Behold the issue—do not grieve—
I died that my own truth might live.





UGANDA.

ON the shores of Lake Nyanza,
Near the Nile river's hidden springs,
Reigns the Emperor of Uganda,
The greatest of Negro kings.

He hides himself in his palace—
Who looks upon him must die ;
For the Emperor of Uganda
Is afraid of the Evil Eye.

A guard of fierce black women
Encircles his throne around ;
With a singular wreath of reptiles
Their sullen brows are crowned.

Uganda.

Dark wine in a carven goblet

Each holds in her hands on high,

For a skull filled with wine of plantain

Is a charm 'gainst the Evil Eye.

There is doleful music sounding

In the day and in the night ;

The drums they are made of human skins,

And beaten with thigh-bones white.

By the side of the palace-portal,

With a besom of bitter grass,

There's a prophet that imprecates evil

On the hapless ones who pass.

And close by the prophet of evil

Two terrible giants stay ;

With swords ell-long and bloody,

They smite men's heads away.

Uganda.

Of the skulls is a barrier builded,
An outermost wall breast-high,
For an eyeless skull is a wonderful
Strong charm 'gainst the Evil Eye.

And within the horrible circle,
And guarded by charm and spell,
Harassed with a dread foreboding,
Doth the Negro Emperor dwell.

A look is the thing that he feareth,
His people they well know why,
For the people—with heads—all whisper
That the King hath the Evil Eye.

This tale of the King of Uganda,
And his kingdom far away
On the shores of Lake Nyanza,
I read but the other day.

Uganda.

And I said—I no longer wonder

At the tales that travellers bring,

For Uganda might well be Richmond,

And Davis the Negro King.

1863.





THE TOKEN.

BY the path of ferns, sweet Maud doth go,
 Into the wild-wood sauntering slow :
The touch of a tender trouble lies
On her white brow and berry-brown eyes.

The mottled maple is overhead,
The gum-tree, waving its red, blood red ;
But naught of beauty sweet Maud can see,
For trouble born of her love for me.

Staying her steps in the purple calm,
Where the sumach slumbers, with breath of balm
She whispered—" O wood ! I seek a sign :
Tell me, O wood ! if his love be mine ?

The Token.

Swift was the answer—for, strange to tell,
Fluttering down on her bosom fell
The last green leaf of the Autumn wood,
Stamped with a heart as red as blood.





IN MEMORIAM.

IN that dim moment, ere the dawn appears,
He came into a deep and dewy glen,
Filled with the wreck of war—with shattered spears,
Dulled swords, and dead and ghastly men.

He feared not, though all weaponless he stood,
Clad in a hunting suit of Lincoln green ;
Nor gazed with sorrow on the field of blood,
Nor moved with joy his countenance serene.

But swiftly passed unto that palace where
The princess slumbered ; staid not in the hall ;
Nor did he loiter on the marble stair,
But climbed unto a chamber highest of all.

In Memoriam.

There found her lying in a trance like death,
With all the world around her lying dead ;
Pulseless, with not enough of perfumed breath
To stir the tresses falling from her head.

His kiss unsealed her eyes ! their lids upraised
The dead world from its trance, and waking life
Flouted the mouldering silence, and amazed
Long voiceless echoes with its babbling strife.

O kiss of love ! thine is the master spell,
The witchcraft that no hoary sage hath taught ;
O perfect meeting lips ! what words can tell
The marvel such another kiss had wrought !

But of that kiss there is another song ;
For now the glad prince and his princess fair,
Together glode the corridors along,
Descended noiselessly from stair to stair,

In Memoriam.

Until they passed the portal, to the dawn
That touched with amber all the rim of day,
And crossed the shade of the neglected lawn,
To the dark place wherein the dead men lay.

He paused, as with intent to linger there.

“O love! make haste. O linger not!” she cried,
“I knew them not, O love! nor do I care
To know by what mischance they grimly died.”

He made a solemn gesture of dissent,
Full of all princely tenderness and grace;
Full, too, of priestly reverence, that lent
A holy sign to hallow all the place.

And said—“Beseemeth us to bow to fate.
Believe me, but for those who perished there,
O love! I had not been thus fortunate,
O love! thou hadst not been so very fair.”



SONG.

ONCE again this day returning,
Bids the fount of song to flow,
For my heart, sweet wife, is yearning
With the love of long ago ;
Long ago—while thus 'tis rhyming,
But a moment it appears,
But one golden moment chiming
Through our happy wedded years.

Fading flush and failing favor,
Of our youth its changes speak :
Wife, my brow is growing graver,
Paler is your matron cheek ;

Song.

But 'tis well—and I will never
Mourn as lost your maiden charms :
Lo, in sweeter guise than ever,
Now you bear them in your arms.

Our romance of love to banish,
Time shall wave its wand in vain ;
Though its fairy visions vanish,
They shall live for us again.
Little feet are treading lightly
In the old, enchanted way,
And its star is dawning brightly
On the brow of Baby May.

Wife and babe, I fondly gather
Your dear forms unto my breast,
Husband loved and loving father,
Now am I supremely blest.

Song.

Pleasures past and present gladness

Flow not from my feeble arm—

Lord, Thou givest joy and sadness—

Keep my loved ones safe from harm.*

* Answered—Not to my wish, but according to His will.





TO SIDNEY.

WITH IDYLS OF THE KING.

HERE are four women, picked from all the
world,

By one, the foremost poet of the world :

Enid, who purely serveth love and wins ;

Vivien, who maketh love serve her and wins ;

Elaine, lily maid, who dies for love ;

And Guinevere, sad queen, who for love sins.

All these are beautiful, and all, save one—

The subtle Vivien—are sorrowful ;

And to but one is love a lasting joy.

O Poet ! your fine fable fools us not ;

We do not deem you dreaming, though you dream.

To Sidney.

The table-round and the round world are one,
The same with Arthur and Victoria ;
In beauty and in chivalry the same,
The same in love, the same in wickedness—
And surely thence in sorrow 'tis the same :
It is your world, O Sidney ! a rare world,
Full of rare creatures, as these Idyls sing,
And rich in noble opportunity
Of worthy use, true love and lasting fame ;
And you, a woman in it, may so live,
Your life shall make an Idyl, different
From these, with such melodious difference
As one bell from another in the chime,
Which yet doth make the harmony complete.





MY VOYAGE.

“There was a ship, quoth he.”—*Ancient Mariner.*

THE trading fleet dropped down the bay,
I saw their southward-bending sails
Grow broad before the grateful gales,
Dip a farewell, and fade away.

So vanishing ; yet well I know
O'er Summer seas, with prosperous tide,
A gracious company they glide,
Or in broad calms rock to and fro.

Their decks are strewn with tropic flowers,
And woman's smile and dance and song
Make the rich sun-tide seem not long—
And love claims all the twilight hours.

My Voyage.

They win from strange and savage strands
The dusky slave, the fruit, the wine,
The diamond from the Indian mine,
And all the wealth of foreign lands.

Fate hath forgot the way they went,
Their rosy round horizon beams
A barrier to disturbing dreams,
Measures a measureless content.

The way they went I cannot go,
No trader I—yet even now,
Full freighted and with restless prow,
My bark chafes at the cable-tow.

Courage! my soul, we venture forth
Alone—before the stars were born
Fate crowned us to this hope forlorn—
Our voyage lies to the north.

My Voyage.

The perils of the way I guess ;
Ice barriers frown on either hand
From the locked sea, and all the land
Is a white, wide, waste wilderness.

A horror waits and watches there,
And, king o'er all the region rude,
Silence awes shuddering solitude,
While in thick darkness broods despair.

Runs up the sky a rosy light
That breaks, and a warm picture falls,
Of seas, and palms, and latticed halls,
Then drops into the jaws of night.

Beneath, a spectral ship I see—
All ice—the crew died one by one ;
They stand like statues carved in stone—
Nameless, and lost eternally !

My Voyage.

I hate the south wind's wooing breath ;
Rather than float with wind and tide,
Or at the wharf Lethean ride,
I would dash on the shores of Death.

I know there is an open sea
That lies beyond the frozen Pole—
If we may reach it, O my soul!
Rest is appointed unto thee.





SONG.

I AM not I—I seek myself in vain,
And know not what I seek—this is my pain.
Death shall unriddle all.

Thou art thyself—thou hast no part in me ;
Thou art thyself, and I am naught to thee.
Then welcome Death.





THE MOSS-WORKER.

GREEN and brown,
Brown and green,

Brightest mosses

That ever were seen :

Mosses of many a mingled hue,

Her slender fingers are glancing through.

Miniature towers,

Miniature trees,

Fairy bowers

An elf to please,

Cluster and cling in every part,

Finer than any forms of art.

The Moss-Worker.

Green and brown,
With silvery dew,
Darker shadows
Are falling through:
She weaveth them featly with fancy free,
And a face that is better than all to see.





PRELUDE.

I T was an ancient hunter
Who leaned on the sycamore-tree,
And told a tale of other times
To the lady I love and me.

The forest-leaves were yellow and red,
The distant hills were blue ;
And the Autumn air with a visible smile
Did soften the sunlight through :

And the sycamore spread its branching palms
In their nakedness on high,
Like a sturdy beggar asking an alms
Of the loving and pitying sky.

Prelude.

We looked at the river beneath our feet,
We looked o'er the hills away,
And we looked on the old man's face,
And his locks so thin and gray.

He told us the story, as I said,
In a voice that was solemn and slow,
And her cheek touched mine, and I could feel
How her breath would come and go.

Of woman's love and woman's truth,
It was thus the story ran—
No other story hath ever been told
Since first the world began.

And the melting silence—the old man's voice,
And my lady and I did seem,
With the witnessing river, and death, and life,
To be drifting away in a dream.



THE MAIDEN'S PRAYER.

O'ER the storm ascending ;
Over the raging sea ;
Winds and waters blending
Carry my prayer to thee.
Queen, from heaven bending,
Pity, O pity me !
Mary maiden,
Mother mild,
Hear thy trembling child.

Passion's tempests lower,
Threat'ning my lonely bark ;
Tides of mystic power
Hurry it through the dark.

The Maiden's Prayer.

In this dreadful hour

Be thou a saving ark.

Maiden mother,

Hear my prayer,

Make me still thy care.





WARNER JUSTICE.

NOW that the day begins to dawn,
We, who have waited through the night,
And watched the long eclipse of right,
Must grieve the more that he is gone.

Vanished, as in the earlier morn,
The lofty longing Kings of old,
And Prophets, who might not behold
The Great Deliverance to be born.

Yet we believe that from their skies
They bend in still and steadfast forms,
And through the earthquake and the storms
They guard the cradle where it lies.

Warner Justice.

When he was with us here, we know
His faith was pure ; his hand was strong,
And sought such contact with the wrong
As liveth in a downright blow.

And thus he kept his faith more pure
Than doth the chary careful saint,
Who holds himself aloof from taint,
On lofty pedestal secure.

His was the clear and steadfast thought ;
The perfect truth he fully knew,
Claimed all God's possible as true,
While in man's possible he wrought.

His was the old and simple plan ;
He had no scheme beyond the sense
Of daily-working Providence,
Which slowly moulds the world and man.

Warner Justice.

He mingled with the hate of wrong
The heavenly charity that still
Rains blessings on the good and ill—
The charity that suffereth long.

And thence his life was peace ; its breath
So quiet, none could count it strange
When fell the last and final change,
And quietly he slept in death.

January, 1863.





SONG OF THE CHIMES.

WEARY ones, weary ones,
Rest from your toiling,
Lose, lose your trouble now,
Care and turmoiling ;
Out in the sunshine come,
With praise and blessing
Unto the Saviour
Fervent addressing :
Proud ones and haughty ones,
Humbler growing,
Come, O ye sinful ones,
Mercy is flowing ;

Song of the Chimes.

Hasten, O hasten,
The morning is wearing,
Wearing like life in youth,
Noon is appearing ;
Hasten, O hasten,
From evil flying,
Ere love be wearied out,
Ere day is dying.
Weary ones, weary ones,
Rest from your toiling ;
Lose, lose your trouble now,
Care and turmoilng.





MY ATTIC.

I AM a pleasant thinker,
And merry things think I,
In my dingy attic up aloft,
In my attic near the sky.

My attic-walls are tattered and bare,
Yet it matters not a pin ;
Through the broken windows I can look out,
And no one cares to look in.

My attic-ceiling is cracked and old,
And rain comes a-dripping through ;
But that is naught, for on Summer nights
It lets in the moonlight too :

My Attic.

And the pleasant stars go circling round
 To get a peep at me,
As I smiling sit in my elbow-chair,
 With my head thrown back to see.

I sit aloft in my attic dim,
 And laugh out merrily,
While over the wide world everywhere
 Strange voices laugh with me.

I sit aloft in my attic dim,
 In sadness and in mirth,
That overflow my brimming heart
 And run through all the earth.

Along the lines my hand hath traced
 The manly voice swells high ;
The maiden listens to the tale,
 With tear-drops in her eye.

My Attic.

The little children toss their arms
Aloft in the rosy light,
And murmur the word they overheard
In their pleasant dreams at night.

The aged pair, in their chimney-nook,
Are smiling through their tears,
As I flash a gleam from the morning land
Through the rifted shadows of years.

Where young souls press in a lover's kiss,
My words are breathed between ;
They are whispered in secret by many a heart
That beats full high I ween.

I am no old-time conjurer,
With a wonderful magic wand,
Yet I move an hundred thousand hearts
By a movement of my hand.

My Attic.

O, I am a pleasant thinker,
And merry things think I,
As I sit aloft, and laugh and weep
In my attic near the sky.





A TRAGICAL TALE.

I.

ONCE on a time, on a Summer day,
Not a great while ago, nor far away,
At the place where the scene of my story lies,
You might have discovered, by using your eyes,
A little old woman quietly sitting
All by herself in a cottage, knitting.
No, not all alone, for there was the cat,
Close by her foot, on the corn-husk mat ;
And the old dog, lazily winking his eyes
To chase from their lids the bothersome flies,
Lay on his paws at the open door :
The chickens—there must have been a score—
Came close to his nose. Abroad was heard

A Tragical Tale.

The chirp of cricket and coo of bird,
And a little noise when the leaves were stirred ;
For the life of Nature was all in tune
With the quiet and warmth of Summer noon.

II.

'T was an ominous calm—to be broken soon
By a storm more fierce than the dread simoom ;
For two great armies silently came
Close to the cot of the dear old dame,
The one in blue and the other in gray ;
The fate of a mighty nation lay
On the chances of war that Summer day.

The fife was mum,
And no tap of drum
Told what had come.
The cavalry men
Trooped down the glen.
Up on the mound

A Tragical Tale.

The cannon found
Their favorite ground.
Down by the run
Lurked a monstrous gun.
This army in blue, and that one in gray,
Were getting ready each other to slay,
While the little old woman was knitting away.

III.

The pickets began it—pop-pop-pop-pop !
The old dame heard them, but could n't stop,
She was setting the heel, and that, you know,
Is nicer than narrowing off the toe ;
She must keep count of the stitches, and so
She made her fingers the faster go ;
Holding her breath,
Half scared to death,
Half scared to death—but she could n't stop !
As the scattering pickets' pop-pop-pop

A Tragical Tale.

To a steady volley of musketry grew,
The old dame's fingers the faster flew ;
Faster and faster—nor long before
The rifles were drowned in the great guns' roar,
What with the bother of setting the heel,
And the dread of the cannons' peal on peal,
She was so bewildered she did n't know
Whether to stay, or where she should go ;
So she sat in her chair
With a vacant stare,
Swinging her gray head to and fro,
Knitting away in a terrible trance,
With a pinched and a pallid countenance.

IV.

Over the fields, by the tangled screen
Of a narrow laurel-lined ravine,
Down by the stream, and on the hill,

A Tragical Tale.

At the great stone fence, and the old stone mill,
There was wild work during that Summer day,
For a thousand brave men lifeless lay,
Face downward, clasping the bloody sod,
Or with dead eyes looking up to God !

There was one young boy, in a suit of blue,
With his tender bosom shot through and through ;
A pitiful sight ! O let us pray
No rebel took aim at him that day,

But by mischance

Some shot did glance,

Or a careless bullet went wide astray.
O let us believe that his fate was blest,
For he lay as an infant lies at rest,
His white hands clasped o'er his wounded breast ;
With a smile on his lip, and the light on his brow,
Ah ! could his mother but see him now !

A Tragical Tale.

V.

Over the stream, past the laurel bloom,
A thousand traitors had met their doom.
There, all in his elegant suit of gray,
A mortally wounded General lay ;
Plucked by the Nation out of the dust,
And raised to places of power and trust,
Nourished and fed by her loving hand,
Sworn doubly in her defence to stand,
He was the first of the faithless band
Who struck at the life of their native land ;
Making of knighthood their empty boast—
 With sacred oath,
 And plighted troth,
And every chivalric virtue lost !
Among his ignorant dupes he lay,
And as his life-blood ebbed away,
Through his filmed eye-balls' gathering gloom

A Tragical Tale.

What vision he saw of judgment doom
I shall not tell ; but the mortal dread
Of that moment, fixed in the face of the dead,
Makes horrid the lips, the eyes, the brow —
Ah ! could all traitors see him now !

VI.

The battle still nearer and nearer came
To the cot of the dear old knitting dame ;
The great guns made a terrible sound,
And the bullets were flying thickly around.
The little birds had no business where
Whirled fiery shells that sang in the air,
So they hid away in a precious scare ;
The rabbits, started from under the vines,
Ran plump into the enemy's lines ;
And plumed and spurred Sir Chanticleer
Drooped his feathers in craven fear ;
Why, even the cat,

A Tragical Tale.

Just think of that !

When the bullets were flying around like hail,
And she found that it was of no avail
To put up her back, and stiffen her tail,
Withdrew in rather a hasty way
To the cellar ; she was n't afraid to stay,
No more than the colonels who go to the rear
In the heat of battle are moved by fear :
They mean, of course, to come back again
When they've looked "after rations for the men !"

VII.

The trancéd dame, at the setting of sun,
Had rounded the heel, and the foot was done ;
Nor fast nor slow
Her fingers go,
Steadily on in the way they know,
And were just beginning to narrow the toe,
When suddenly stocking, needles, and all,

A Tragical Tale.

Were shot away by a four-pound ball !
The dame did n't mind it at all, at all ;
And still she sat in the twilight gray,
Scared to death, as one might say,
With her absent fingers knitting away ;
And there she 'd have been till the present day,
Had not a tall artillery man,
Grizzled with smoke and brown with tan,
With a voice as loud as his cannon's roar,
Bounced suddenly in at the open door ;
And before she had time for new alarms
The dear old creature was fast in his arms,
And kissed and pressed
To his brave young breast ;
Dear reader, you surely can guess the rest.



PSYCHE.

I LIVED in a phantom house,
Fast by a phantom stream,
And, near, a ghostly forest grew,
On the mountains of a dream,
Reflecting to the spectral sun
His unsubstantial beam.

I was lured by phantom sights,
I was lulled by phantom sound,
I walked upon the purple skies,
I swam upon the ground ;
And flowers of unreal dyes
My foreign forehead crowned.

Psyche.

I wept with phantom friends
A fleeting shadow's woes ;
In deadly strife my alien arms
Grappled with phantom foes :
On the bosom of a phantom bride
I lay down to repose.

I learned a phantom lore,
And all its wisdom knew,
Of doubt and faith, of true and false,
If aught be false or true ;
Until—O, wonder not!—I deemed
Myself a phantom too.

At last, in mercy from above,
A swift, bright angel came,
Monarch of all the phantoms he—
Azrael is his name,

Psyche.

Through warp of sense and woof of thought,
He smote with sword of flame.

Dissolved the phantom show of life—
It faded from my view ;
And what I was, and what I am,
I felt, and fully knew.
Patience, O mortal ! bide thy time,
And Death will teach thee too.





WRITTEN IN A LADY'S ALBUM.

IN spite of woman's worth and power,
Love grows in man by small degrees,
As swells the bud into a flower,
As verdure clothes the leafless trees.

A waving curl, or sparkling glance
From eyes aglow with star-lit fire,
Or feet that twinkle in the dance,
First catch the eye—and we admire.

The graces of a glowing heart
Reveal themselves as moments fly,
And budding friendship doth impart
A brighter lustre to the eye.

Written in a Lady's Album.

But soon unmeet so chill a name,
For wreathéd hands and lips must prove.
These kindle an intenser flame,
And quickly friendship turns to love.

This course is sure ; but yet the wise
Reliance on the rule should shun :
The lightning of Lucinda's eyes
Might melt the three degrees to one.





SONG.

KING Richard rides with flowing rein,
On a pilgrimage afar ;
One knight among his knightly train
Shines as the brightest star !
Kemp Owyne,
Sir Kemp Owyne,
The Lord of Laristine.

The monarch, with his lancers brave,
Redeems his plighted word ;
They march to seek the Master's grave :
One seeks the arisen Lord !
Kemp Owyne,

Song.

Sir Kemp Owyne,
The Lord of Laristine.

More than a thousand knights of name,
And bold as e'er drew breath ;
They long for lands, or love, or fame ;
One only longs for death !

Kemp Owyne,
Sir Kemp Owyne,
The Lord of Laristine.

In Paynim lands, let minstrels tell
What mighty deeds they wrought ;
What fate unto their hopes befell ;
One found all that he sought.

Kemp Owyne,
Sir Kemp Owyne,
The Lord of Laristine.



PRELUDE.

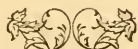
L IST to the secrets that bloom and bloom
Where the wild swamp roses grow ;
And wander abroad in faint perfume
Whenever the South winds blow.

O, list to the secrets of wonder
That the dark pine forests know ;
They ring from a harp of thunder
When the blustering North winds blow.

In thy brain are the forests growing,
In thy bosom the roses bloom,
Thy pain in their shadows flowing,
Thy joy in their sweet perfume.

Prelude.

And mine are the secrets of wonder,
And mine are the winds that blow;
I smite on my harp of thunder
The chords of thy joy and woe.





DRAMATIS PERSONA.

MR. FUDGE, THE POET.

AS easy, 't is, as lying. See! I take
Some fancied barren rascal—call him
Sludge ;

Put in his mouth familiar talk of Saul,
Jonathan, Cæsar, Bacon, and their like,
Who speak through him their shallow messages
From t'other world, mixed with a crude discourse
On truth and falsehood, rather less obscure
Than my best essays in philosophy.

A dull invention—shallow !

That I grant ;

Dramatis Persona.

Lacking the spice which thus I dredge upon it ;
Add caricature, or its tags and rags—
Some easy strokes—a chat of Presidents,
Cocktails, V-notes, and Greeley's newspaper,
A little ungrammatic nasal slang ;
And straight my Sludge is something more
 than Sludge,
A type of Yankee nationality !
And this is satire.

 Wise the artist, who,
Missing a likeness to the noble face
Of the great Emperor, painted his hat ;
A hat, the like of which he never wore
Save in such daubs. What odds ? It did as well ;
The hat was recognized—the people cry
Vive l'Empereur !

 Ah ! I know the tricks
O' the trade, and use them to advantage ;
And when the play grows dull I laugh myself—

Dramatis Persona.

(*Vide* Hamlet)—there's a barren quality
Still left among my patrons ; if the wit
Is thin, there is the toothsome malice left.

A common poet, gazing from the tomb
Of classic virtues unto the New World,
Might see a soldier subjugating States,
Great with the sword and greater with the pen.

I see my Sludge—

A statesman more than brave,
Serene, while the rude storm shakes all the
house ;

Trusting the people, trusting more in God,
And to the least of His poor little ones
Giving the cup, e'en though the fount may fail.

Sludge—Sludge, forever !

What I would, I know ;

Dramatis Persona.

There's nothing mean but ministers to use.
The Gladiator stood, with sword and shield
Advanced, fronting the lion, masterful ;
A gnat smote in his eye—the man went down,
The beast was victor. So my Sludge, my gnat,
My gad-fly, haply may annoy and harm,
And help to give a triumph to the beast ;
Or, show that I, in my philosophy,
Questioning which is better—man or beast—
Care nothing for the issue, break my jest
And pass, well knowing that the beast will win.

January, 1865.





ATLAS.

O, I am very weary of the world,
And I am sorry I essayed to bear it,
And angered that I bear it all alone.
It was my evil demon tempted me.
From age to age the burden heavier grows,
And I am weary, yet I still must bear it ;
And sometimes, what with weakness and despair,
I swoon, and half the world slides from my grasp,
And, agonized, I clutch and hold it up ;
Nor can I sleep for fear that it should fall.

It was my evil demon tempted me.
From age to age I fear my mem'ry fails ;
And yet I think there was a happy time,

Atlas.

When I bore not the burden of the world ;
When I was young, and strong, and free to roam
Whither I would—for was I not a god ?
Are not the gods all free ?

Alas ! I fear—

Such swift confusion falls upon my sense—
That fate hath fettered the immortal gods.
The careless ease in the Elysian fields,
The day of mirth in Ethiopia,
The revel on Olympus—all have fled,
And each is lonely, and each bears a world,
Nor helps the other—none has aided me.

And worse than all my weariness, the doubt
That all my weariness is wasted ; that
I crush myself for naught, and groan for naught,
And that the world would stand without my aid,
And I might free myself, nor would it fall.

Atlas.

If it should fall? Below me in the deeps
Lurk hungry Nox and Chaos open-mouthed,
Forever keeping fixed and silent watch
For that sure moment of forgetfulness,
Or utter weariness, or wantonness—
I know not what—that shall dash down the world
Into the horror of their formless jaws.





OUT of our deeper moods, we come upon
The face of nature—and it is the same
That our most casual glance hath noted.
'T is otherwise with men. It happens oft
That I have won some fair acquaintanceship,
Slow ripening into friend—most surely grown
In confidence—until 't is deemed secure.
Comes a time—unsought—I look into this face,
And something in me or within it changes ;
All groweth strange ; the smiling eyes are strange,
The ears stand wide, the cheeks have fallen away
From the nose, the beard bristles portentously,
The mouth is monstrous. 'T is no face—only
A jumble of features—and I shrink back
Appalled, and think—I never knew him.



NAY, love ! I 'll write no letters in the night,
Unless you 'll read them all by candle-light.

And wherefore so ?

Shall instinct warn in vain ?

Would the dim stars their tender influence rain
When smites the garish sun along the travelled
plain ?

Ah ! there are moods that the moonlight brings,
And airy thoughts with tremulous wings,
And a speech as of spirit-whisperings.
The fear that some love-tempted, shrinking sprite
Should steal into the missive I indite,
To come upon your after-dinner mood,
Would work some discomposure in my blood.

GETTYSBURGH.

THERE is one test of manhood. Strike the
skies

With fiery thought, or girdle all the spheres ;
O'erstride the Earth, and on up-gazing eyes
Rain the clear wisdom of the ripened years.
Art thou a better man than men of yore,
Like crook-thumbed Richard of the Lion Heart,
Who knew no science taught in bookish lore,
And, dying nobly, mastered all their art ?
Or art thou great in manhood as the boys
Who for their country fought but yesterday,
Scorning young life, with all its budding joys,
Nor felt their pulses quicken in the fray,
Who through the glare of War's red battle-breath,
With steady-fronting eyeballs went to death ?

QUESTION AND ANSWER.

A M E R I C A .

MEN say, Columbia, we shall hear thy guns,
But in what tongue shall be thy battle-cry?

Not that our sires did love in years gone by,
When all the Pilgrim Fathers were little sons
In merrie homes of England ! Back and see
Thy satchelled ancestor ! Behold ! he runs
To mine, and clasped, they tread the equal lea
To the same village-school, where, side by side,
They spell "Our Father." Hard by, the twin
pride

Of that gray hall whose ancient oriel gleams
Through yon baronial pines, with looks of light,
Our sister-mothers sit beneath one tree.
Meanwhile our Shakespeare wanders past and
dreams

His Helena and Hermia. Shall we fight ?

SIDNEY DOBELL. 1854.

Question and Answer.

ENGLAND.

We did not fight thee, England. In thy need
Our manhood scorned to strike at thee a blow,
And though we have our taint of merchant greed,
We sold nor ships nor cannon to thy foe.
We kept true faith ; albeit we could not know
Whither thy tangled policy might tend,
And that dread Czar, enthroned in Norland snow,
Was our most ancient, firm, and trusty friend.
We did not smile and stab. Here wave no pines
Where Shakespeare wanders, but thy Clark-
son's shade
Bends through the smoke above our battle-lines,
Where the last stand for Liberty is made,
And hears the shriek of Freedom's martyred sons,
Murdered — O, loving England ! by thy guns.

1863.

THE TEST.

AND blear-eyed Science looked upon the race
That takes its color from a tropic sun,
And said—These are not men, marking the place
In the world's book, where to mean life it won.
Strumpet Theology forth flaunted then,
Babbling of Ham, Canaan, and a curse ;
And the doomed souls of all dark-visaged men
Doubled away beneath the doubtful verse.
Came there a figure all in martial guise,
More glorious than Greek-imagined Mars :
Waving a sword before the bondmen's eyes,
He shouted—"Up! and forward to the wars!"
They rose—they bravely fought—they died—and
then
Failed the old lies. The world cried—These are
men.

THE DAWN.

THROUGH my dull sleep there surged a sudden shock :

I stood dilated, as a giant strong,
And dashed down from the dread Tarpeian rock,
The clouted spectre of an ancient wrong.
Like a harsh discord drowning heavenly song,
Doubt swept my transient triumph unto doom ;
Old faith, old fears, old hates—a hideous throng
Of obscure shapes—peopled an hour of gloom.
A dreadful hour ! The love that lured me on,
Till murder stamped it with a bloody seal,
Fell from me. Yet the fated goal was won,
And mine it was, with strange delight, to feel
Creep through my veins in the awakening dawn,
The slow sweet transformation of the faun.



TO-MORROW.

WHY should I dull my weary eyes
O'er volumes dry and dusty ?

Why con the lore old time supplies
To learn its maxims rusty ?

Why agonize to find the truth
That knowledge is but sorrow ?

Let me enjoy the flush of youth :
I will be wise—To-morrow.

And blame me not that I refuse
To win earth's golden treasure,
And gaining it, submit to lose
The tastes that it might pleasure.

To-morrow.

No, what I have I 'll freely spend,
And when 't is gone I 'll borrow :
Hope is the friend that still will lend ;
I will be rich—To-morrow.

I woo and seek to make my bride,
A sweet reluctant maiden,
Fair as the spirit shapes that glide,
Beneath the bowers of Aiden ;
That I shall win her, who will doubt ?
Why should I pine in sorrow ?
Ho ! bid the wedding-bells ring out,
She will be mine—To-morrow.

Let misers hold the shining gold
Their lives were spent in earning ;
And fair enscrolled in parchment old,
Remain the scholar's learning ;
Let wedded love its transport prove,
Or moan its deeper sorrow ;

To-Morrow.

Such things my soul can never move —

I 'm waiting for—To-morrow.

The boasted beauties of to-day

Are all too poor for scorning,

Matched with the morrow's noon-tide ray,

The sunrise of its morning.

I fling aside with noble rage

The moment's joy or sorrow ;

I seek a grander heritage

In the unknown—To-morrow.

Alas ! Alas ! the morrow strays,

For which my soul is yearning,

With the long line of yesterdays,

Forever unreturning.

Shall I resign the fruitless race ?

Shall hope give place to sorrow ?

No, through eternity I 'll chase

The mirage of—To-morrow.



I CARE NOT, FRIEND.

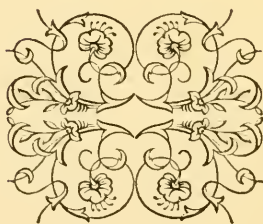
I CARE not, friend, if it be true,
Or if it does me wrong,
The saying that no swelling tide
Of feeling floods my song.

Believe me, my poetic thoughts
Unto my poems are,
Like endless azure spaces,
With here and there a star.

Or, like full Autumn silences,
That find no uttering word,
O'erflowing when from under-foot
The cricket's chirp is heard.

I Care Not, Friend.

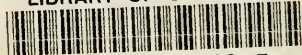
Or large or little, you may choose ;
The greater and the less,
Nature atones in tuneful use
Unto one perfectness.







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